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GERALD

THE FAÏENCE VIOLINS.



FAÏENCES of Delft formed the subject of an article in the July number of this journal, wherein I had occasion to speak of the wonderful sonority characteristic of those faïences, and of certain violins that during the eighteenth century were made of that ware. It is my purpose now to give some information on this curious subject, undoubtedly one of

the most interesting in the demesnes of ceramics.

Some twenty-five years ago the faïences of Delft began to be the rage among collectors and art amateurs. Pilgrimages were expressly undertaken to Holland, Belgium and Normandy for the purpose of securing bits of Delft, Rouen and Nevers. On one of these excursions the celebrated antiquarian Sauvageot was walking arm in arm with his fellow-collector and friend, Monsieur Pottier, through the Rue Eau-de-Robec at Rouen, when, stopping before a bric-à-brac store, he happened to notice beneath a cabinet the upper part of an odd enameled piece of porcelain representing a scroll similar to the spiral shell of a Doric column. Pleading some excuse, he hurriedly left his companion, made his way back to the store, and behold! there was a faïence violin such as he had long dreamed of and coveted to possess, although he had ultimately come to believe that what he had read in books about violins in faïence was a myth. But here at last was a faïence violin which had "contours to make a Stradivarius jealous." Its enamel was of incomparable purity. Its delicious blue recalled the azure skies of Spain. Not a crack, or a blemish even, on the fine curves of the neck. Never had the potter's art reached so high an achievement. The back was decorated with angels playing on viols in the clouds, and displaying a scroll with the motto, "Musica et gloria in aer." Below was a group of figures in Louis XIV. costumes, surrounding a pretty woman seated at the harpsichord. Our illustration (Fig. 1) gives a faithful representation of the design. The front, as shown in Fig. 2, was ornamented with architectural designs in the Dutch style, with a trophy made of musical instruments after the manner of Lépant, and Cupids in various attitudes. Sauvageot bought the precious instrument, and, crazed with joy, communicated at once the news to his friend Pottier. The latter came near losing his wits, as the possession of such a rarity had been no less the dream of his life than of Sauvageot's. His grief was so deep that his friend could do no less than promise to bequeath the treasure to him in his will. The promise was kept, and Pottier, in his turn, willed it to the Museum of Rouen, where it is now to be seen. Out of this story Champfleury made a charming novel, which has been so cleverly epitomized by Mr. W. H. Bishop in *The Atlantic Monthly* (May, 1879) that I do not think I can do better than give it, somewhat abridged, in his own language:

"In 'The Faïence Violin' we are first introduced to M. Dalègre, a citizen of Nevers. He is a jovial bachelor of thirty-five, of ample fortune, who hardly knows that there is such a thing as pottery. Making a casual visit to Paris, he falls in with Gardilanne, an old friend and schoolmate, who is a confirmed collector. He passes for having the keenest scent in Paris. 'A diabolical astuteness' takes the place, with him, of capital. He is not rich, but has managed upon his income of a thousand francs as government clerk to get together a collection which is the envy of museums. He hardly eats or sleeps, and has scarcely dreamed of any thing else for fifteen years. He encounters rain, wind and hail in the pursuit; he goes to the length, if need be, of passing himself off as a rag-and-bottle man, to have an opportunity of examining stocks of old trumpery. In him the disease is fully seated, but in Dalègre we are shown its gradual rise and progress. He looks at the plates and ewers which his enthusiastic friend places in his hands with about the intelligence of a bat at fireworks. Living as he does in so promising a locality, it occurs to the Paris collector to turn him to account. He might pick up a few pieces, while he

simple. If you find there is no faïence, your complaint will of course immediately disappear. If there is, it will become serious, and you must manage in the end to take, beside the medicine, the bottle that contains it.' This ardor by degrees inspired a slight interest in the breast of Dalègre himself. It was increased by the indignation of some people who complained of his robbing his native town of its treasures, for the benefit of a cold and greedy Parisian. At last he found himself bitten with the infection. He began to send his friend packages which he knew to be unmitigated rubbish, as an indication that Nevers was exhausted. The confiding Parisian wrote to him of the faïence violin which he had just heard of from M. du Sommerard, the founder of the Cluny Museum. It was believed to be extant at Nevers, and he was adjured to search for it. He entered vigorously upon the quest, but he muttered to himself, 'Oh, yes, I'll play you a jig upon your faïence violin.' He had become more perfidious than lago.

"Thus matters ran on. He has not heard from Gardilanne—doubtless disgusted with the paltry stuff he had sent him—for a long time. His hard heart smites him a little, but he does not relent.

One day, at supper, his servant hands him a letter, which has been received in the morning, during his absence. He toys with it, and does not break the seal till he has nearly finished eating. He gives a cry of dismay. It is a notice that Gardilanne is on the way to visit him. He is due in twenty minutes. The distracted master runs hither and thither, not knowing where to begin. The house, full of pottery, must be dismantled; Gardilanne must not discover his treason.

"It is hurriedly determined to remove the specimens from one other room and the guest chamber, to which he can possibly be confined until, at night, the rest can be removed and secreted in the cellar. The manoeuvre is barely accomplished when the redoubtable Parisian collector arrives. He has secured a vacation, and will commence to-morrow to be at a grand battue in the Nivernais. Dalègre's heart sinks within him; for in this tour among the dealers his own occupation must inevitably come out. He determines to accompany his guest like his shadow wherever he moves, in order to find some means of turning aside indiscreet revelations.

"From this point to the crisis of the story, the discovery of the faïence violin, Dalègre and Gardilanne are as ill at ease in each other's company as two galley-slaves dragging the same chain and meditating different methods of escape. They come, upon the last day of their rounds, to an old shed full of second-hand goods on the quay. To Dalègre's astonishment, Gardilanne, after a little inspection of the interior, appears to be

impressed with a bulky wardrobe about which there is absolutely nothing of interest, and begins to drive a bargain for it.

"'It is worth a good fifty francs, if it is worth a sou,' said the proprietor.

"'Come, now, you are chaffing. I will give you forty,' said Gardilanne.

"'Why, I can get you a car-load of them for half the money,' expostulated Dalègre aside.

"After further jockeying, Gardilanne promises to think about it. They leave the shop. But no sooner are they again at Dalègre's door than Gardilanne claps his hat desperately upon his head, turns about, and takes to his heels, leaving his amazed and rotund host completely in the lurch. Returning to the dealer,



FIG. 1.

FIG. 2.

THE VIOLIN OF FAÏENCE IN THE MUSEUM OF ROUEN.

was around town, and send them up to him as well as not. Dalègre receives his direction as to what is desirable, and agrees to do so. It is faïence or fine stoneware, in which there are many beautiful objects, and not pottery in general, which is Gardilanne's particular hobby.

"Dalègre complies with his promise. Praises and profuse instructions are showered upon him by his friend. 'Make tours in the churches,' urges Gardilanne. 'Happily, the village priests know nothing of archæology; they will let you have things cheap. The hospitals, too, are a fruitful field. In their pharmacies there are beautiful old jars made to contain drugs. Manage to get a wound in hunting, or a sprained ankle; a mere scratch will do. The Sisters of Charity are very

he renews the bargaining for the wardrobe. Amid the rubbish in the interior the artful collector has discerned the marvelous violin. It sang to him like a rare bird from an ignoble thicket. Dissembling his ecstatic feelings, he affects to make light of it as a petty children's toy.

"'Nothing of the kind,' said the dealer; 'that violin is worth six francs, I can tell you.'

"Gardilanne thought he should be seized with vertigo. He was obliged to sit down. Six francs for a treasure worth six thousand at least! These are the shocks that shorten the collector's existence. 'I'll tell you what I'll do,' he managed to say, with a tremulous effort at self-control. 'Throw in that crockery trifle, and I will give you forty francs for your wardrobe. I have a small nephew to whom I suppose I might make it a present.'

"The dealer consented, with an appearance of grumbling. Gardilanne departed, with his treasure under his arm. 'But you have not told me where to send the wardrobe!' called out the man as he was disappearing.

"'To the bottom of the river!' he muttered, hurrying on.

"Who can picture the condition of Dalègre when the marvellous violin, thus carried off from under his very nose, was shown to him? A mist swam before his eyes; he could hardly see it. And the triumphal entry of Gardilanne into Paris! He was prouder than a conquering general returning from his wars.

"Time did not abate the chagrin of Dalègre, but rather increased it. At last Gardilanne relented to the extent of agreeing to leave it to him in his will. At his death the violin passed into the possession of Dalègre. The emotions of this poor man seemed to have been tried to the limit of endurance. But they were to be racked still further. While making his elaborate preparations for suspending the violin in his cabinet, the fancy took him to play an air upon it. He tightened the screws to secure the proper pitch. More. A faïence violin is not made to stand the pressure of ninety pounds, which the strings at their full tension exert. It flew into twenty pieces. For a moment the unhappy man was mute. Then he rushed in fury upon the rest of his museum. His servant endeavored to stop him; he hurled her against a cabinet of specimens, which crashed down and added to the ruin. The passers-by rushed in; the fire department followed; under their feet the remains of the collection were ground to powder. Dalègre was stark mad. A friend of his gave utterance in a café to a witticism, which must be rendered in its own tongue: 'Dalègre has fallen into *defaïence*.'

"The author, however, is a merciful person, who by no means desires to lay himself open to the attention of the proposed society for the protection of readers. He does not leave us with the clamor of this complete catastrophe ringing in our ears. A supplementary paragraph explains that Dalègre had a benevolent aunt and pretty cousin in the place, who took care of him in his sickness. He had brain fever for a month, during which he dreamed that the world was inhabited entirely by faïence people who were very polished and brilliant, it is true, but declined to have any intercourse with each other for fear of spoiling their enamel. He awoke entirely recovered from his delusion. After a proper interval, he espoused the pretty cousin, who took care never to allow him to relapse into it again."

The moral of the story is that, while the general disposition is to look upon the passion for "collecting" as harmless and amiable, carried out to its logical consequences, the passion may be the cause of "an enormous species of egotism and avarice, of betraying the warmest friendships, of revealing falsehoods and perfidies, and of stopping short only of robbery and assassination."

The Delft violins still in existence are five. A singular legend is told about the origin of them by Monsieur

Demmin in his "Manuel de l'Amateur de Porcelaine." On the occasion of the marriage of a potter's four daughters to four young ceramic painters at Delft, the company of painters, modelers, potters and turners opened the dance with the four bridegrooms at their head, each of whom was playing on a faïence violin made by the skilful potter, and painted by the bridegrooms. These violins, it is said, were preserved in the family for generations until Delft lost its importance as a faïence manufacturing city. One of these instruments, undoubtedly the poorest of them all, is now in the Museum of the Paris Conservatory of Music. Its decoration consists merely of branches and foliage in blue camaieu somewhat after the Chinese style. Its form is thoroughly Italian—that is, not quite so large and flat as that represented in our illustration (Nos. 1 and 2), which is German. The third of these instruments, also of German structure, was in the Demmin collection at Paris; but I cannot say where it is to be seen at present. Perhaps it is the same that Champfleury mentions as being in the possession of Monsieur Fétis, the celebrated historian of music. It is profusely decorated, the decoration as usual being in blue camaieu. The upper part shows a number of people attired in the quaint fashion of the Dutch about the close of Louis XIII.'s reign. Some are playing on string instruments, and some are dancing; and there is a lady taking some refreshments at a table upon which are a spit-box and a hand-warmer, two indispensable articles in a Dutch household of the time. The other side is decorated with Cupids, branches of trees and flowers, entwined in the style of the Renaissance modified by Chinese influ-

Several theories have been advanced to explain the origin of these instruments. The practice of the painters in representing scenes of music and the dance leads Champfleury to suppose that at one time it was the fashion to present such instruments to composers distinguished for their minuets and contradances. Were the writer to hazard an opinion, it would be that they owe their origin to the mere whim of a potter, tempted in the first instance by the sonority of the ware manufactured at Delft, and the experiment having succeeded, the fancy became a fashion, especially in connection with certain ceremonies and feasts peculiar to the potter's life. This much is certain, however: Champfleury grossly deceived himself when he supposed that these violins were all painted by the same hand. It may be remarked, in conclusion, that the place of these instruments is the shelf of the museum and not the orchestra; for, however sonorous they may be, they are far from having other musical qualities. Their importance is chiefly due to the difficulties the potter must have had to contend with in modelling and baking them, and from the singular beauty of their decoration. In this connection they are indeed worthy of being considered as triumphs of the potter's art.

MAURICE MAURIS.

AMONG the Chinese curiosities at Tiffany's is one of the finest specimens of cloisonné enamel extant. It is a tablet about four feet high and eighteen inches wide, showing a landscape with four figures representing two priests of high rank complimenting an emperor upon his accession to the throne. The sky is in a graded tint (a most unusual effect in cloisonné work), running from a pale turquoise blue to the intense color of lapis-lazuli. The partitions which hold the enamels are not as numerous as they would be on a round surface, such as that of a vase, for they are not so essentially needed on a flat surface to secure the enamel to the mortar. The cloisons in this sky consist of nine rows of eighteen letters, each forming a poem complimentary to the emperor. The tint of the trees and foreground, the richness of the dresses, and the accuracy of the details, place this panel in the first rank of enameled work. The piece is said to date from the early part of the seventeenth century, and is perfectly well preserved. It is framed in carved teak-wood, and there is a stand to match.

THE experiments carried on in the old ceramic laboratories of Italy resulted more than once in the production of porcelain. Although no specimens remain of that made about 1567, under the patronage of Alfonso II., Duke of Ferrara, the fact of their existence is well authenticated; but pieces of the porcelain produced from Vicenza kaolin in the laboratory of Francis I., of Florence, in his castle of San Marco, are still extant. These discoveries were, however, prosecuted no farther.

THE Japanese divide their art, which is always decorative and never ideal, into seven classes: 1. Black and white. 2. Pictures painted with two brushes, one wide and one narrow. 3. Chinese style. 4. Common illustrations. 5. Hooksye's works (Japanese Hogarth). 6. Gold and brilliant colors. 7. Mountains and water (landscape).

A NEW AND INGENIOUS PROCESS has lately been introduced in France for electrotyping on non-conducting materials, such as china, porcelain, etc. Sulphur is dissolved in oil of lavender spike to a syrupy consistence, and with this a solution of chloride of gold or of platinum is mixed at a gentle heat, the whole then being evaporated until it assumes the thickness of ordinary paint. It is applied with a brush to the portions to be covered, baked in the usual way, and then immersed in the bath.

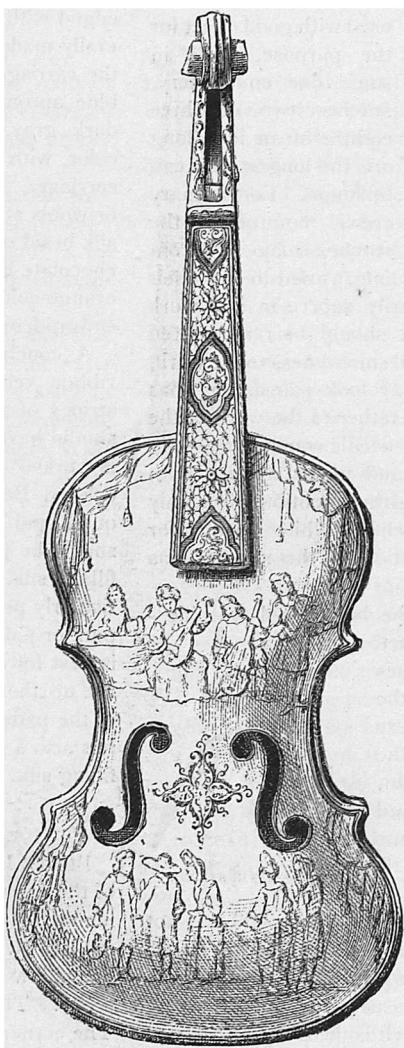


FIG. 3.



FIG. 4.

THE VIOLIN OF FAÏENCE IN THE COLLECTION OF M. EVENEPOEL.

ence, as was nearly every thing that came out of the Delft factories. The fourth is likewise German in form, and is spoken of by Demmin as having been in the collection of Herr G. F. van Romondt, Utrecht. This specimen is now in the hands of the famous collector, John Loudon, Hague. The subject of the decoration is described as being, on one side, a kermesse in a village with a violin-player perched on a cask, on the other a ball-room, in which an aristocratic feast is in process, the orchestra occupying a gallery near the ceiling of the hall. The fifth of the violins is shown in our illustration (Figs. 3 and 4). It was discovered by Champfleury at the Hague, and bought by M. Evenepoel, one of the most enthusiastic collectors of faïences in Brussels.